

F R E E D O M

The first of Blessings.

With native Freedom brave,
The meanest Briton scorns the highest Slave.

Addison.

THERE never was an Affair that related to the Public, which while it was depending, has been more universally the Subject of Censure, than the Bill for an Excise upon every Man thro' the Province. As it is now published for every one's Consideration, it may, it ought to be treated with the utmost Freedom, and to have no more Mercy shown it, than *that* shows to the Liberties of the People. It was judg'd to be, and so it will appear, the most pernicious Attack upon *English Liberty* that ever was attempted; and tho' it was gloss'd over with the specious Pretence of making the Rich pay for their Liquors, as well as the Poor, which no Body I know of is averse to, yet it is certain this ought to be done by other Methods than enslaving the whole Country. The particular Advantages of distinct Communities were forgot upon this Occasion, and Liberty, Heaven-born Liberty, the Source of Vertue, the Nurse of Industry, Wealth and Contentment, the Concern not of a few, but of every Individual, was the sole Motive to the Opposition. The Minds of People were mov'd with a generous Disdain to see the most valuable Interest they had in the World trifled away, the noble Ardour spread thro' all Ranks and Degrees of Men, and affected every one, except a Number of those who ought to have been the first that felt it: A Number of those, I say, for some few, like *Milton's Abdiel*, were faithful found, whose Names stand upon Record, and of whose Merits and Services their grateful Country will never be unmindful. As for the Promoters of it, who will have

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the Honour likewise of being known, tho' all of them can't be suppos'd to have particular Views of Advantage to themselves, nor were all of them *Excise Officers* before, yet their several Towns, 'tis hop'd, will make them understand, that such an Insensibility with regard to the Rights of Mankind, such a Numbness of feeling in this respect, is attended with as bad Consequences, as any wicked Designs whatever.

When the famous *Tobacco Bill*, known commonly by the Name of the *Excise Bill* was brought into Parliament in the Year 1733, the most vigorous Opposition was made to it from all Quarters of the Nation. The grand Inquiry was, not how it affected the Town, or how it affected the Country, but how it affected the whole Island of *Britain*. And tho' it was push'd on at first with all the Force of ministerial Influence, the Minister himself, after a first reading, chose to give it up, rather than increase the Ferment of the People. The Rejoycing upon its Fall was universal. The City of *London*, as it was first in the Opposition to it, so first began the Triumph at its Overthrow. The first Night, and for two Days after, Demonstrations of Joy were to be seen every where; the City throughout was illuminated with Candles and Bonfires, and the Rings of Bells were kept continually playing, the Populace crying out *No Excise, no wooden Shoes*. The same publick Rejoycings were made almost in every City and Borough in *England*. In short, the Rejoycings were like those upon a Victory: And not without Reason, for Conquests abroad are much less valuable than the Possession of Liberty at home. And as in ancient Triumphs the Emblems of conquer'd Cities, and Figures of Men adorn'd with captive Arms attended the Victor's Chariot; so upon the above-mentioned Occasion, odd Figures dress'd up with Ribbons, with Pipes in their Mouths and Bottles in their Hands, were carried about in great Pomp, and at last thrown into the Flames. In particular at *Rygate*, the Image of a *fat clumsy Fellow* was carried about the Town, with distinguishing Marks upon its Habit, and after various Indignities offer'd, it was thrown into a large Bonfire. Such were the Circumstances that attended the famous *Excise Bill* in *England*: Such the Rejoycings upon its Destruction. And yet this Bill was but a Bawble in Comparison of that now in Question among us. It immediately affected only the Dealers in *Tobacco*, and none else were subject to any Enquiry. Every Man besides might smoke his Pipe and drink his Glass under his

his own Roof, and no Officer could come in to call him to Account for it. Here was no Oath to be taken by private Persons: No Family Transactions to be sworn to, nor Fine for those who refus'd to wear such a Badge of Slavery. But what can we think would have been the Consequence, had every honest Housekeeper in the Kingdom found an Officer set over him, who could oblige him to declare upon Oath, or get him smartly fin'd if he would not declare how many Pipes had been smok'd, and how many *Quids* had been chew'd in his Family. In all Probability the Scene of *Wat Tyler* would have been reviv'd, and the People have rais'd as great a Tumult, at a Scoundrel Exciseman's meddling with their *Tobacco-Pouch*, as they formerly did at one of that Kind's thrusting his Hands under a poor Girl's Petticoats.

And now I have mentioned *Petticoats*, I can't help observing, that the good Women of *New England* would do well to take Care of *theirs*; for by the Bill I find Mr. *Exciseman* is to have the Examination of them too, according to the Words *him* and *her*, and if they refuse to swear, he may possibly insist upon *personal Security* for the *Ten Pounds*, Lawful Money. For I can tell them, Honour is not likely to be the distinguishing Characteristick of a Fellow that will take upon him such an invidious Office. I hope the Tea-Tables and other *Female Associations* will take this Affair into their serious Consideration, and use their Influence, as the *Roman Matrons* did formerly, to save the State. Some modern *Marcii* may be found, who tho' deaf to the Voice of Reason, will relent at Female Intreaties, and not insist upon the Ruin of their Country. It is no Joke, I can assure them; the Bill shall speak for itself. “*Be it further enacted*, That every Person of whom the Collector—or his Deputy shall in Manner aforesaid, demand an Account of the Wines, Rum, or other distilled Spirits by *him* or *her* consum'd—and who shall either declare that *he* or *she* hath not consum'd any Wine—except what *he* or *she* hath purchas'd—shall, if requir'd—declare the same on Oath, &c.

Tremble then, ye Fair, such of you I mean, who retire often to your Closets, not altogether for Devotion. The Oath will pursue you into your most secret Apartments, and bring to Light what was done there: *Citronia* must bid adieu to her Bottle or her Fame: And

And *Marrettella's* Confessor will find out that the pretty little Stammer in her Speech, is not always owing to Affectation.

The *Ammonites*, we are told, in ancient Days, took it into their Heads to bring certain Messengers sent to them from *Judæa*, under the *Laws of Excise*: And this they preambled too, no doubt, to be for the greater Benefit and Advantage of the Public; for in short, they took the Gentlemen to come upon an illicit Trade, by which the Government would be losers. Accordingly, instead of fining them Ten Pounds, lawful Money, they took them and shav'd off one half of their Beards, and cut off their Garments in the middle. Both King and People highly resented this *Ammonitish* Trick, the People were ashamed to be treated so, and the King thought it an Indignity which ought not to be offer'd his Subjects. Some Folks may think there was not much in the Thing; Tailors and Barbers existed, we may suppose, in those Days as well as the present, who could soon have mended the Matter, the Tailors by furnishing them with new Skirts, or new Coats, and the Barbers by supplying them with supplemental Beards, as easily as your modern ones do the Ladies with their fine curl'd Locks. But the Case was this, every one of the Sons of *Jacob* had a Right to wear a long Beard, and a Garment below his Knees; and no Body had a Right to make him look like a Fool, by taking away half of either of them. The *Ammonites*, we may well imagine, laugh'd when they saw the odd Figure the poor Men made; for your mischievous Folks are apt to laugh and sneer when they think they have got their Wills; and their Brethren the *Israelites* would have laugh'd too, for it does not signify, a droll Figure will excite Laughter even in those who sincerely pity the unfortunate Object, had not *David* the Ruler, the Man after God's own Heart, by advising them not to be in a hurry to show themselves, given them an Opportunity of bringing all to right, and so wiping off the Reproach from *Israel*. And shall not we make as ridiculous a Figure in the Eyes of our Neighbours, with our Liberty curtail'd in the Manner which is threatned, as *David's* Messengers did with their excis'd Beards and circumcis'd Skirts? For it seems to me a grave Councillor of the *Massachusetts*, holding up his venerable Hand, before an imperious Deputy *Exciseman*, and solemnly declaring upon Oath, whether he laid in his Wine by the Pipe, or bought it by single

gle Jugg from *Hamock*, is as whimsical a Sight, as an old *Israelite* with naked Buttocks and half a Beard.

But to return to ourselves. We reverence *England* as our *Mother Country*. The People of *Britain* value themselves on the Possession of their Liberties the most of any under Heaven: Of these Liberties what regards *the internal State of their Families* is one of the most sacred. Nothing is more becoming in Children, than to imitate the Virtues of their Parents, and nothing will prove our Descent better than an inviolable Attachment to those Privileges, which an *Englishman* would sooner die than part with.

But our Ancestors were not only free born *Englishmen*; they were Men of Religion too; Men that trembled at an Oath, and thought the Name of *the Great God of Heaven* was not to be mentioned but in the most serious Manner, and upon the most solemn Occasions. It is really surprising, that some such Consideration alone did not stop the Progress of the Bill: That the Advocates for it did not see the unbounded Licence given a Deputy *Exciseman*, tended immediately to lessen the Reverence of an Oath. And when an Oath is treated with Disregard, and us'd in a slighty careless Manner, what Bond of Society is left? What Tie sufficient to connect Men together? All Sorts of People by the Bill are oblig'd to take the Oath, and to have it administred by a Person that may be quite unfit for such a Solemnity, a Deputy, who we may depend upon it, will be of the lowest Rank, and whose Character alone will be enough to render all he does contemptible. But as my Design was to consider this Bill only with regard to civil Liberty, I shall enlarge no further upon this Topick, but hope that those whose Business it is to teach the People, that the *Fear of God is the beginning of Wisdom*, will take this Opportunity, for it will be a *Word in Season*, to establish well this Foundation of all Religion. It is a Matter of infinite Moment: The Morals of the People depend intirely upon it; Truth, Justice, Goodwill, mutual Trust and Confidence, and every social Blessing.

Happy it is for us, that we have a Gentleman at the Head of Government, who knows much better, and feels more sensibly what touches the People's Liberty, than most of those who are chose on
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Purpose to be its Guardians. Who to a constant and steady Zeal for our Welfare, has lately added a most engaging Instance of his Integrity, and whose Tenderness for our most important Interests, must needs raise in every virtuous Mind, a Monument of Gratitude of more Value than a hundred Statues.

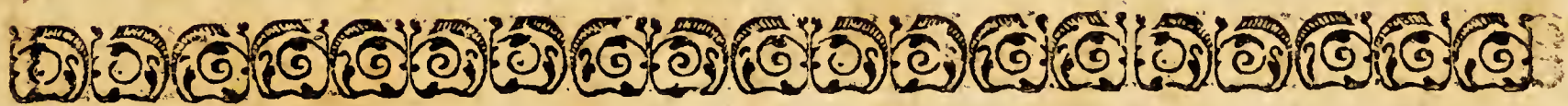
In Consequence of the Bill's being published, every Man now, thank the Governor for it, will have an Opportunity to see with his own Eyes, how near he has been to Slavery, and to judge for himself, whether he will consent to wear a Yoke for the future: Whether he will consent that the Man for whom he gave his Vote in order to maintain his Liberty, shall give *his* to an Act which puts every Freeman in the Province, upon the same Footing with a Tavern keeper: Whether he will consent to have a Master set over him, to whom he must tell, and swear to it too, if his Master bids him, how much spirituous Liquor has been drank in his Family.

Many Artifices, no doubt, will be made use of to soften this Affair, and the People among other Things will be told, that the great Clamour rais'd against the Bill is only a *Scarecrow*, that the mighty *Hydra* that threatens to devour their Liberties, is nothing but an Officer who is to wait upon every Man once a Year, and in a *civil genteel Manner*, ask him to be so good as to tell him, what Wine or spirituous Liquor he has had Occasion for. As for the Oath, the Officer is not oblig'd to tender it to any one, but is only *empowered* to give it to all whom he suspects. But two or three plain honest Questions, will set this Matter in a true Light.

This *civil and genteel* Officer, may he not if he pleases, be *very uncivil and very rude*? And are Men in these Offices usually remarkable for *Civility and good Manners* to those under their Power? Has not Power a natural Tendency to make a Man insolent, especially when committed to Creatures of such a Stamp, as the lower Officers usually are? May he not if he pleases, suspect every Man in the Province? If he is not oblig'd to put every one to his Oath, has he not Power to do it? If I refuse to take the Oath, must not I pay *Ten Pounds*, lawful Money? Is any private Man in any other Part of the *British* Dominions expos'd to such an Insult? Nay, is any Subject in the Dominions of the grand Monarque? Will not this
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same Officer have an Opportunity to gratify his Malice against any particular Persons? Will he not find a Way to work out some private Interest of his own, which at present cannot be thought of, to the Injury of others? Can a Countryman, who employs his Neighbour that comes to Market in Town, to purchase his Wine, or Spirits for him, as is frequently the Case, swear with a safe Conscience, that they were purchased of those who had paid the Excise? And is he not expos'd to be harass'd if he refuses? May not some new Emergency require with equal Reason, that I should give an Account of every Thing else I have in my House, and even how many Shirts I have to my Back? And may there not happen some future Change in our Constitution, when what is done now will be made an Argument for some new slavish Device hereafter?

Pious Divines tell us, that seldom a Man commences a compleat Sinner at once; he usually begins with one Sin, and that smooths the Way to another. It fares so with Liberty. Most of the Nations now in Slavery, fell into it by Degrees: One Point given up, made Way for a new Demand, and one Encroachment succeeded another, till at last nothing remain'd to give or take, all was lost, and Liberty, 'tis to be fear'd, once lost, is lost forever.



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